

ABSTRACT

Order filling apparatus and methods are disclosed. A plurality of racks are provided for storing a plurality of products. Each rack has a plurality of bins for holding specific products. A central conveyor is provided for receiving specific products from the bins according to orders. A plurality of intermediate containers are positioned above and along the central conveyor for temporarily holding products from the bins. Each container includes a dispenser operable to discharge products onto the conveyor. An indicator is associated with each bin and includes a light, a number display, and a container display. A computer is operably connected to the container dispensers and bin indicators. The computer assigns containers to parts of the orders and sequentially operates the light, number, and hopper displays of the indicators, thereby directing a stock worker to transfer order parts from the bins to the containers. The computer further operates the dispensers of the assigned containers holding a complete order to discharge at substantially the same point along the conveyor. In addition, a delicate product packing station may be provided for handling breakable stock items.